

Gone, But Not For Long by yikesyies

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Gen, Just Bear With Me, M/M, im constantly crying over the season finale

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathon Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Dustin Henderson/Lucas Sinclair, Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

Time moves on. But these kids won't.

Not until Eleven comes back.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

watch the show before you read this because spoilers

me, after the season finale: CAN'T WAKE UP

also i might change the title, depends on whether or not i continue this or not

Her eyes fluttered open, and the pain was gone. The classroom was dismal and dark, covered in vines of living flesh, with no sign of life anywhere you looked. It was silent, only the sounds of the last wisps of life that were connected to the Demogorgon fading away.

“Gone. Demogorgon is gone,” Eleven whispered to herself, slumping to the floor. She pulled her knees up to her chest, shoving her muddy dress over her knees. She closed her eyes as she allowed herself to cry, and finally allowed the exhaustion and pain that had overwhelmed her since the moment she saved Mike from dying on his fall off the cliff to take over. She allowed herself to mourn for the loss of all those she saved and would never see again. So she cried. She cried over the terrible things her Papa let happen to her, over the lives gone because of the monster she let loose, of the power she didn’t have a complete hold on yet. She cried and she cried, her sobs distant and strange as they reverberated in the Upside Down, another prison she’d be forced to call home.

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“She was just...gone?” Nancy asked quizzically, rubbing Mike’s back as he sobbed into her shoulder. The boys had finally gone home, the events following the death of the Demogorgon leaving all of them with mixed emotion; they no longer had to fear being picked off one

by one by such a nightmare, but they had lost the very girl that helped them save their friend that had gone missing in the first place.

“Y-Yeah. The Demogorgon just kind of turned into pieces, like ashes, and then they were all surrounding her, and then she was gone,” He said, his voice meek. Nancy sighed, patting her brother on the back.

“Well, then we’ll have to find out where she is then, huh?”

Mike pulled out of the hug, confused. “But...she said goodbye to me. She sacrificed herself and used all of her power on killing the Demogorgon. She thought she was going to die.”

“Yeah, and we thought Will and Barb were dead. At least we were wrong about one of them,” she said, eyes sad as she smiled at her brother, “So we need to keep looking. We’re *going* to keep looking.”

Mike nodded, wiping his nose on his sleeve. “Yeah. Yeah, okay.”

A month passed in painful slow motion, the only time the Wheelers and Byers were able to forget the pain brought by thinking about Eleven when they were around Will. The boy who came back to life was what kept these two families sane, kept them hopeful that if they could save Will from the Upside Down, then maybe Eleven wasn’t dead. Christmas came and went, and then another month and the Snow Ball passed, and then another month; one after another, until a whole year had gone by, and everyone in the small town of Hawkins had forgotten about the monster that plagued them, and about the girl that saved them. The familiar crisp sensation of an autumn breeze rustled the colorful dried leaves that crunched under the

wheels of bikes racing down Mirkwood road, and Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Will raced each other to the mysterious box in the woods they had discovered during the summer.

“Hey, no fair, Dustin! You can’t just pull a dick move like that and expect to get away with it!” Lucas shouted out after Dustin, dusting himself off along with a scraped Mike who had fallen off his bike after Dustin “accidentally” kicked their bikes.

“Whoa, hold on. Well, would you look at this-Oh, I’m getting away with it! ” Dustin shouted out behind him, laughing as he pedaled faster, lifting himself off his seat as he disappeared behind the trees. Mike rolled his eyes as Will pulled up behind them.

“Man, why’d I bet that Daredevil action figure?” Lucas groaned, picking up his bike in a huff. “Dustin never plays fair.”

“It’s okay, Lucas. It’s just because he always loses bike races. I mean, even Will can beat him,” Mike said with a shrug. Will nodded, not taking offense to the statement. Lucas looked at him in resignation.

“You’re only okay with his crap right now because we’re going to check on Eleven’s box.”

Mike looked at him, staring for a couple of seconds as if he was trying to find a response or an excuse to say. He shrugged.

“Yeah.”

Lucas sighed, hopping onto his bike. Mike and Will followed his example, and the two biked lazily into the forest, keeping their eyes out for the strange box that blended in with the forest's background.

"Over here, guys!"

The three skidded to a stop as Dustin waved them over, finding the box they had visited every day since July. He was waving frantically, his other hand holding his hat down as his excitement poured out of him.

"The food's gone!"

Mike set his bike on the ground and ran over to the box, sliding onto the leaf-covered dirt and opening the box they had just filled with slices of birthday cake from his 14th birthday party the day before, and gasped in surprise as he found the box completely empty, save for some frosting smeared against the wooden frame.

"Aw man, did that raccoon get into the box again?" Will said as he walked his bike over. Lucas put his hands in his pockets, shaking his head.

"Well, I'd take three chocolate cake slices if I could, too. We're honestly just wasting food doing this, guys."

“No, look. The way the frosting is smeared, it’s like actual human fingers did this,” Mike said giddily, looking all around the box as if he could see Eleven in it if he tried hard enough.

“I mean, it could have been some hobo that took it, too, but yeah, it could have been Eleven,” Dustin said. Mike shot him an annoyed look. Dustin shrugged.

“What? Just saying, man.”

“What are you boys doing here?”

The four jumped, startled at the sudden interruption of their conversation to find Chief Hopper standing in front of them, holding a stack of Eggo waffles wrapped in plastic.

“You kids the ones that have been putting food in there, too?” He asked. The boys looked at each other nervously, a moment of silence passing between them before Mike finally nodded.

“Are you the one that made this box?” Mike asked him. Hopper sighed.

“Yeah. It’s just...just in case Eleven ever comes back. I thought she’d be hungry if she did, so I’ve been leaving food here and there.”

“Well, it looks like she might be hiding in the forest,” Dustin said,

pointing to the open box.

“Or...stuck in the Upside Down, but gets out through rifts?” Mike speculated. “We saw the monster turn into pieces, but we only saw El disappear. So maybe she got transported one last time, and there’s a rift around here that she can’t get through, but can reach through to get into the box!”

“That sounds like a desperate grab at straws, Michael,” Hopper sighed, taking off his hat as he knelt down beside the box. Placing the stack of waffles into the box, he felt a sudden hand on his shoulder.

“I think it’s possible. Plus, I really want to meet her, so yeah,” Will said. Lucas and Dustin exchanged glances as Mike’s eyes lit up with hope; the boys subconsciously depended on Will’s say when it came to theories on the Upside Down. Having actually been there, captured, and alive to tell the tale, his experience is what Mike relied on nowadays. If he disappeared and made it back, then maybe El could, too.

Hopper scratched his head as he turned and faced Will, who looked at him with simple resolution, as if the matter had already been settled. The intrusive image of feet upon feet of tendrils leaving Will’s mouth flashed in his mind, and he looked down in a grimace.

“Well,” Hopper said finally. “I’ll be here to help if you guys get any leads. Just promise me this,” He said, looking up at the other three boys in all seriousness. They shuffled a bit, still uncomfortable under his gaze despite the help he offered to them just a year before.

“If any other hellspawn has to do with her being gone, you don’t take it on. You leave it alone. You kids and your families have been through enough already, and the last thing I need,” He said, looking at Will, “Is for you to disappear again.”

The boys hung their heads, hesitant to agree to such terms.

“At least, not without getting me first. And maybe your mom, too, Will. She’s a hell of a fighter.”

The kids smiled, looking at each other giddily as they were given permission to continue such a perilous search for their friend.

“Definitely,” Mike said with a grin.

“Alright,” Hopper groaned, pushing himself onto his feet and putting on his hat. “Don’t you troublemakers start screwing around with the universe’s laws or anything while I’m gone, and tell your mother I said hello, Will.”

“Will do, Chief,” Will said with a knowing smile.

Chief Hopper cleared his throat and waved goodbye before walking out of the forest, hands in his pockets. Lucas patted Will on the back.

“Man, isn’t it weird to have Hopper crushing on your mom like that?”

“I don’t really mind,” Will said. “My mom’s happy, so it’s okay.”

“Yeah, and you could also get away with breaking the law and stuff. I bet you could rob a bank and get away with it, since Hopper’ll be too busy making googoo eyes at your mom,” Dustin said with a laugh. Will rolled his eyes as Lucas and Dustin pretended to be his mother and Hopper, acting hopelessly and dramatically in love.

“She really could have been here.”

The moment was interrupted as the three saw Mike wipe his cheek, trying to keep the unprecedented tears at bay. He smiled, getting up and looking at his friends in delight.

“Hey, we should save up and buy a cassette player or a Walkman for El!”

“Uh, no? Why not save up and buy a Walkman for yourself?” Lucas said, confused and surprised at Mike’s sudden suggestion. Mike rolled his eyes, jogging back to his bike.

“Because I want to show El some songs and record myself and stuff. Duh. If she can grab things through that box, then we can at least communicate through the Walkman! And it must really suck being stuck in the Upside Down-”

“-If she even is, though I still think it was a hobo that took the cake-”

“-So we should try and get some cassettes and like, record ourselves and stuff, and then El could hear us and know that we know she’s still alive, and that she’s there!” Mike finished.

Will nodded, approving of the plan. “I have ten dollars saved up right now. That’ll get like, three tapes, right?”

“I’m gonna get myself a Walkman before the weirdo does,” Lucas muttered under his breath, the name no longer an insult and more of a teasing nickname.

“Oh, if we go home and wash my dad’s cars, he might pay us three bucks each!” Dustin offered. The kids hopped onto the bikes and raced to Dustin’s house, feeling exhilarated with possibility that Eleven might someday come home.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Ah, the 80's.

Notes for the Chapter:

I never experienced them lmao

also shit i AM making an alternate season two shit
fuck damnit

Hard. Smooth.

Biting the corner of the cassette player gingerly, she licked its side and frowned in disappointment.

Not food.

Eleven turned the foreign object around in her hands, instead biting into the third Eggo waffle she had found in the box as she fiddled with the strange buttons on it. The wheels inside it turned when she pressed a specific button, and she spent a minute or two playing with this newfound feature. She found a single, small hole in its side, and she touched it curiously, wondering if it was broken or if something went in it.

After being stuck in the Upside Down for a year, Eleven had learned that there were certain places and objects that were tangible, like little rips in the dimension that allowed her to grab, smell, and see into the reality that was Hawkins. The box was special, though. It just appeared one day, and was filled with food and drink everyday.

Deciding it was safe to eat from it after spotting the first batch of waffles and wings, she made sure to never stray too far from it, searching for rifts in the Upside Down in hopes of being able to actually leave instead of just barely survive.

She carefully picked up the other strange object inside of the box; it was shaped like a half circle, with two round circles at each end. She rubbed the soft material and thumbed the cord that dangled from it, wondering if these two objects were connected. Spinning the chord around in her hand, she winced as the end of it whipped her cheek. Rubbing it in irritation, she grabbed the metal tip, and stared at it. Suddenly, it clicked. Eleven slowly picked up the cassette player and plugged the headphone jack inside.

Nothing happened.

Eleven huffed, becoming frustrated with the device. The headphones looked familiar to her, like those strange hats girls would wear during especially cold autumn days once school was over, and she looked out the Wheeler's living room during her secret excursions around the house. She put them over her ears and set them into her growing hair, the pads cushioning her ears and blocking out the terrible silence of the Upside Down with a different kind of silence. Everything was muffled, and her perplexed hums resonated in her head. She pressed a button on the side of the player, and yelped in surprise as noise began to sound in her ears, intimate and clear.

"Shut up, Dustin, it's recording already!"

Eleven gasped and tossed off her headphones.

“Mike?” She said aloud. Her heart was beating frantically, his voice as clear as day. She looked around hopefully, but couldn’t find him anywhere in sight. She looked at the headphones in hesitation, unsure if she should put them on again. Was it a trick? Was it something her Papa made to hurt her? Could he even get to her here? Did he even know she was here?

Squeezing her eyes shut, she put on the headphones in a hurry and used her powers to turn the little wheels inside of the cassette player back, assuming she could start whatever was playing Mike’s voice over if she did.

“Shut up, Dustin, it’s recording already!”

“Well then tell Lucas-”

“What did I do?”

“Just-let’s just pretend we restarted the tape. I don’t remember how to.”

Eleven could hear Mike clear his throat.

“Hey, El! If you figured out how to use the cassette player, which I know you’re smart enough to do-”

“Hey, weirdo!”

“Hi, Eleven!”

“-Lucas and Dustin say hi, by the way, then you’re listening to us through a recording! Inside of it is this recording of us that’s called a tape, which we’ll use to talk to you and which you can even use to talk to us if you flip it over and press the red button.”

“Can I say hi?”

Eleven smiled, recognizing the voice of Will Byers sounding stronger than when in his weakened state in the Upside down.

“Oh, yeah! Eleven, this is Will Byers; he’s who you saved from the Upside Down, remember?”

“I remember her. She was the one who told me Mom and Hopper were coming for me. Hi, Eleven! Thanks for telling me to hold on.”

“Okay, so that’s everyone! We miss you, but we believe you’re still alive. So please, reply soon! In the meantime, we have some songs on another tape for you to listen to while you wait for us to get you. Talk to you later, El. I promise.”

Eleven nodded, wiping away the tears that rolled down her cheeks. For the first time in what seemed like an eternity, her tears were of joy; the boys knew she was alive, and they knew how to talk to her.

So, until she made it out of the Upside Down, until she was back home with her friends, until she went to the Snow Ball with Mike and finally get to ask him about what touching her lips with his meant to him, she could wait.

She could make it.

Eleven heard the recording end, and the sounds of guitar fill her ears. She bobbed her head, closing her eyes as she hummed along to the familiar song.

“Darling you gotta let me know,”

Eleven smiled wider, knowing the next line and being proud of herself as she sang along to it perfectly.

“Should I stay or should I go?”

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“If you say that you are mine!”

Lucas, Dustin, and Mike belted out lyrics as they danced to the song, Will playing air guitar as the rest of them bobbed their heads to the beat, shoving each other around as they laughed and danced around the basement.

"I'll be here until the end of time," Dustin shouted, shaking himself erratically as he attempted to dance. Lucas snorted and fell onto the couch laughing as Dustin began to do the sprinkler.

"So you got to let me know!" Mike shouted, dropping onto his knees and dramatically raising his hands into the air, the blanket tied around his neck like a cape stuck on his arm. All the boys pointed at Will, who grabbed a broom, brought it to his mouth like a microphone, stood on a chair, and shouted along with the rest of them,

"Should I stay or should I go? "

The song remained the group's anthem as the fall of '84 brought on their freshman year of high school, Eleven never far from their thoughts even as they became swamped with the workload that came with being honors-well, everything. The first time they received a recording from Eleven a week before thanksgiving, Mike and Will cried while Lucas and Dustin freaked out.

"Holy shit Mike, you were right!" Dusting shouted, grabbing his hair in total shock. Lucas whooped as he took off his sweater and threw it on the ground as if scoring a touchdown.

"The weirdo lives!"

Will embraced Mike with a tight hug, and he let him, too overcome with joy to protest looking overly emotional in front of his friends.

It was a simple reply, not even much of a message given back to them. Eleven had given up on trying to record a full message after attempting time after time to, and decided to simply say,

“I will wait, Mike. Promise.”

The boys celebrated in the forest, spending three solid hours thinking of what to record next, until night fell, and they realized they should have been home long ago.

“Ah shit, my mom’s gonna kill me,” Lucas said, running to his bike in a hurry. Dustin sucked in a breath.

“My parents are gonna kick my ass,” He squeaked out, his voice cracking in fear. Mike turned to a pensive Will, who was staring at the box with a smile, in worry.

“Will, isn’t your mom gonna flip out if we don’t take you home, though?”

Will looked at him in surprise, not noticing the boys’ distress before. He blinked rapidly, beginning to stammer.

“U-Uh, no I think it’ll be okay! Just-You don’t have to worry-”

“Nah, man. I’d rather face my mom’s wrath than have you get kidnapped or have you disappear again,” Lucas said. Dustin hesitated a moment before reluctantly agreeing.

“Maybe my parents will go easy on me if I tell them I escorted poor Will Byers home,” Dustin said with a mischievous grin. Will rolled his eyes and took his place on the back of Mike’s seat, which he really didn’t need to use anymore since he was a lot stronger than he was a few months ago after recovery. Swallowing down the secret that threatened to spill out in front of his friends, he plastered on a smile.

“Thanks guys,” He said, his gratefulness genuine but his voice strained.

“No problemo, mi amigo,” Dustin said, putting his feet on the pedals and taking off. “Anyways, Jonathon probably has some more cool songs we can put on another mixtape for Eleven, so let’s hurry up and see if we can write some down before we *really* are dead meat.”

The boys took off, gliding onto the street as their wheels hit the pavement. Will held onto the rims of the bike seat tightly, his knuckles turning white as he tried to keep his composure, and keep his nausea at bay.

“I’ll have to tell them some day,” Will thought as Lucas and Dustin began to tease Mike about his crush on Eleven for the millionth time, *“But I think I’ll just have to deal with it for now. For Mom and Jonathan. For everyone.”*

Notes for the Chapter:

also i just realized that this fic needs to be more "horror" to fit the "supernatural horror" theme this show has got goin on so yeah time to adjust

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Forgetting is easier said than done.

Notes for the Chapter:

i am churning out st material like no tomorrow i
have zero self control

Nancy felt along the groove that spanned across her palm, staring at her room's ceiling and feeling numb.

"You're worried about soft skin? Nancy, you have six honors classes this year," Barbara said, handing her the history notes with a shake of her head. "I think whether or not your hands feel like a baby's butt should be the least of your worries."

"Well, yeah, but," Nancy began to argue, closing her locker and saying a quick thanks to her best friend for her help, "I just...want to make sure that small details like these can be overlooked if I so happen to go steady with someone."

"Like Huge Hair, No Brains over there?" Barb said with a smirk, pointing at Steve Harrington, who was leaning on a locker as he laughed with his friends. Nancy rolled her eyes, purposefully looking ahead as she felt Steve's gaze fall on her.

"No. No, of course not."

The memories were filled with both pain and love, remembering the girl that had been by her side since childhood. Nancy lay on her bed, unmoving, unfeeling as she felt the hot tears roll down her cheeks. She did not blink, she did not sob; she only stared at the ceiling, feeling the groove of her hand and thinking of one thing:

“Barb cut her hand, too.”

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Eleven's chest rose slowly, up and down as her steady breaths lulled in the silence of the Upside Down. Sleep was a miracle in such a nightmare, and as her body took a much needed rest from the excitement from listening to the cassette the boys gave her over and over, her subconscious drifted her off into the far reaches of her mind.

“Eleven, look at me.”

She was in the testing room. It smelled of rubbing alcohol, the light was too bright, the floor was too cold; his gaze was too cold.

“You will do as I say, do you hear me? I have given you an order,” Her papa said, his voice terse and dark. He pointed towards the cage on the table in front of her, which was covered in a cloth.

“When I take off the sheet, crush the subject inside. Make it gone.”

Eleven felt fear grip her chest as she shook her head, backing into the white walls of the confined space.

“No. No,” She mouthed, but her voice was gone. She could not speak, and no matter how hard she shouted, begged, pleaded, her Papa still walked towards the cage in anger, threw off the cover, and shouted,

“KILL IT!”

Mike’s wide, brown eyes stared back at her through the bars of the cage.

“NO!” Eleven screamed, jerking awake. Her shout was lost in the air around her, and for a moment, Eleven felt absolutely terrified. She grabbed her hair in frustration, weeping as she tried to forget the face of the man that she had no choice but to trust all those years.

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“If you’re up, make yourself known, over,” Mike said into his walkie talkie. He listened for a moment for a reply, only hearing a faint, steady hum of static.

“It’s Lucas. I’m up, over.”

“O-oh.”

“What? What’s wrong? You disappointed that Dustin or Will didn’t answer?”

“No, no!” Mike said frantically. “I just-I wanted to talk about something, a-and-”

“You wanted to talk about Eleven. That part’s obvious. You don’t think I’ll listen? Over.”

“Well...more like you won’t care,” Mike said in embarrassment. “Since you might make fun of me for liking her again. O-over.”

“Well, I’ll always make fun of you for falling for a girl before the rest of us, but if you really need to talk, then go ahead, over.”

Mike hesitated. “You sure I’m not keeping you up? Over.”

“Dude, you’re the one that commed us first. Do you really care?”

“...Point taken. Well see, I was thinking,” Mike began, lying on his bed as he prattled of his recent theory about how to get Eleven back out of the Upside Down. Lucas, a couple blocks away, lay on his bed as he listened intently, tossing up his baseball over and over as he paid attention to his friend’s hypotheses and troubles.

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Will stared at the remnants of dying flesh around him, the Upside Down looking grayer and even more rank than the last time he flickered into it. Trying to control his panicked breathing, he turned around as he heard a strange noise behind him.

He looked around frantically, knowing he only had seconds to find the source of the noise before he was back to reality.

“NO!”

Will jumped in surprise, and he was suddenly back in reality, panting as he gripped the sheets of his bed.

“I can’t do this anymore,” He whimpered. He stood up and grabbed his walkie talkie, which he had muted just before setting off to bed.

“So maybe if we muster enough energy-”

“Guys, it’s Will. I need to talk to you about something. Over,” He said, his voice shaking.

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Notes for the Chapter:

yeah this seems filler-ish and short but i really like
what i wrote so you're welcome

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

Come out, come out, wherever you are.

Mike pedaled hard, his calves straining and threatening to cramp up. He panted, he ached, but he refused to slow down. He raced passed the train tracks, knowing Lucas and Dustin were trailing just a few feet behind. The rusted tracks suddenly ran out, and Mike took his feet off the pedals, letting the speed he had built up carry him to the front yard of the Byer's house in a swift, risky turn. He skidded to a stop, hopped off of his bike, and ran to the front door. He banged on it, his hand faltering on the third knock as he realized that Joyce probably had no idea of why they were coming over in such a rush.

They couldn't tell Will's mother that he might be harboring another Demogorgon, or worse-becoming one himself. Sure, Will had experienced hell, but his mother went through hell and back just to save him. Until they really needed her help, they would have to hold off on telling her.

Mike heard Lucas and Dustin stepping up the stairs of the porch. All three glanced at each other, and the mixed emotion of fear, dread, and concern seemed to be mirrored among the three of them. The doorknob twisted, and Mike turned to face the door. Jonathan gave them a tired smile as he held a plunger in his hands.

"Oh, hey guys. Um, isn't it a little late for you guys to be out? It's like nine-thirty," he said, leaning back to look into the kitchen, probably searching for the time.

Mike sucked in a breath, forgetting that they would have to keep this

secret from Will's older brother as well.

"Uh, yeah," Lucas started, until Jonathan shuffled back in surprise to reveal a frantic Will.

"Whoa, what's going on? Why are you guys acting all weird?" Jonathan asked, his expression slowly growing more suspicious by the second.

"We forgot to finish a project due tomorrow! We need Will to come to Mike's right now, and we'll have him back by 11:00, just in time to get a full eight hours of sleep for school," Dustin lied smoothly. Lucas and Mike nodded vigorously in agreement, only slowing down when Dustin tried to subtly slap their arms.

"Um, Mom's still at work though, and I gotta fix the toilet and I could use some help..." Jonathan said hesitantly as he looked at the anxious teens.

"Just tell her I'm at Mike's doing homework. You know she'll understand. I really need to finish this project, Jonathan," Will said, his voice smaller than he wished it would be. Jonathan glanced at his brother, lips pursed, and sighed. He ran his hands through his hair and shrugged.

"Um, let me just call Mom and tell her where you're going, I guess. But please, all of you, get back home by eleven. I mean it."

Mike twitched ever so slightly before nodding in understanding.

“Yeah, we will.”

“Alright. Be safe, kiddo. Get all your work done, and don’t screw around too much,” Jonathan said with a playful smile. He ruffled Will’s hair and then returned inside the house, walking towards the house phone and readjusting the grip on the plunger as Will hopped outside and shut the door.

“Okay, what’s wrong?” Mike said. An air of dread fell over the boys as Will swallowed thickly, and shook his head.

“I’ll tell you at your house.”

.... .-.. .-..

Eleven lay on the ground of Mike’s home, hands on her stomach and eyes closed. She felt at peace in the place she had taken refuge in after her escape from Benny’s diner.

“Benny .”

The name was bittersweet as she thought it, the memories of the first act of genuine kindness she had ever felt and the first casualty of her escape swarming in her mind as she lay on the ground. He was just an average man, a cook who was making a living in a small-town

diner; he was supposed to have lived a long life. But because of her presence, he was dead. Eleven shuddered at the sight of Benny falling to her ground, remembering how her stomach clenched and her breathing hitched. The overwhelming nausea was only stifled by her instinct to run.

Benny was gone.

Eleven opened her eyes, but felt no tears come; just a dull throb behind her eyes that made her head ache. She had cried and cried almost every day when she had first gotten trapped in the Upside Down, and had finally resigned herself to a quiet depression after a few months of imprisonment. She had cried for the first time in what seemed like an eternity after her nightmare; she hadn't had a nightmare since the first few weeks she was stuck, either.

Pushing herself off of the cold carpet floor, she wandered around the gray, decaying version of the Wheeler's home, walking past the living room and towards the entrance to the basement. She reached to open the door, but recoiled as a chill breeze passed behind her, raising goosebumps all over her body. She looked around in a panic.

"Demogorgon is gone. Demogorgon is gone," She whispered to herself, the mantra meant to be comforting as she reminded herself that she had destroyed the beast herself. After a few seconds of quiet, Eleven finally faced the doorknob again, and gasped as she felt another chill; but this time she realized that the wind had a source.

The doorknob was covered in the blackish-pink, throbbing flesh that accompanied every single rift in the Upside Down.

Eleven turned the knob in a flash, uncaring of the disgusting squelch the rift made under her grip as she flung it open. Her eyes were met with the sight of the basement, but in muted colors. She saw shadows, and heard faint whispers of voices that seemed to be coming from down below.

Her bare, calloused feet were accustomed to the cold that seemed to be ingrained into every surface in the world she was trapped in, but she stepped carefully anyways as she made her way down those stairs. She placed her foot onto the hardwood floor of the basement, her heartbeat slow and steady, and the room's colors and sounds, flickering back and forth from faint to nonexistent, were suddenly alive. Eleven blinked, and suddenly, Mike Wheeler was standing in front of her.

Eleven fell back in surprise, crying out as she fell onto the ground. She looked around the now dismal room, shock making her hypersensitive to the world around her. She felt that chill again rising behind her, it's terrifying presence raising the hairs on the back of her neck. She closed her eyes and tried to calm herself, and opened them as she whipped around to face the presence.

Instead, she found Will.

“Guys, don’t freak out?” He said, his voice muffled to her ears, “But I need to throw up to show you what’s wrong.”

Eleven gazed upon him, noticing the slight changes a year of growth had affected Will. He must have hit a growth spurt, because he was practically her height. His hair was kept in a bowl cut, but there were dark bags underneath his eyes, as if filled with the fatigue piling onto him.

She heard disgusted noises behind her, and though the voices were familiar, they were slightly deeper than she remembered. Eleven turned to face Dustin and Lucas, who seemed to tower above her with the few inches they gained on her.

“Throw up? Man, if you’re just sick, why’d you make us bike out to your house?” Dustin said in irritation.

“Guys, shut up for a second. Something’s actually wrong,” Mike said, and Eleven felt her stomach jump at the sound of his voice. It sounded a little deeper, a little bit more mature, but it still sounded like the awkward yet brave Mike Wheeler she had fallen in love with just a year ago. She faced him, and let out a soft gasp as she saw that she had grown so much taller than the rest of them, but his messy hair and soft, brown eyes remained the same, his demeanor still gentle and kind as he stood in front of her.

She could hear Will retch behind her, and another chill went up her spine, but it was more violent this time, as if liquid nitrogen was injected into her veins. She watched as the boys widened their eyes in horror at the sound of a squelch, and turned around slowly, hands shaking as she feared the worst for Will.

“I think it’s...Demogorgon babies,” Will said thickly, looking pale as he held up what looked like a black slug in his hand. “This has been happening for...a while now.”

“How long is a while?” Dustin exclaimed in concern. Will shrugged nervously.

“Um, ever since I came back?”

“Shit. Holy shit. Fuck. Fucking shit,” Lucas swore, pacing up and down as Dustin put his hands to his face in horror. Mike looked at Will gravely, and Eleven was close to collapsing. Her entire body shook in fear, because the sense of the Demogorgon baby wasn’t isolated to just Will; she felt it all over town. In the decaying shops, under the empty streets, and even in the houses of her friends; the feeling was everywhere. But it couldn’t mean that they were spreading. It couldn’t.

“How did you hide this for so long?” Mike said, his voice softer than his expression.

“I would usually just go to the bathroom and spit them up in the sink, or if I had a really bad coughing fit, I’d take a shower and spit up a load. But I’m worried that-”

“They aren’t drowning. Right?” Mike said. Will nodded, and Mike swore under his breath.

“If they aren’t then that means we’ve got Demogorgon babies clogging up the pipes all over town!”

“Clogging up?” Will asked in confusion. Eleven turned to an anxious Dustin.

“Yeah. People all over town are talking about their pipes being backed up, and the plumbers in town are working overtime because it seems like everyone’s got a broken toilet or an empty water tap. My own house hasn’t had water for three days now!”

“Okay, so Demogorgon babies might be all over town. Demogorgons feed on blood, right? So we should be getting concerned when there are some kind of attacks around town,” Lucas reasoned, sitting down on the couch. Will shook his head.

“They won’t attack people right away, I think. They’re too small. Maybe they’ll attack strays? Pets?”

“It doesn’t matter who they’ll attack first; what matters is that they’ll grow up to become monsters, and since we don’t know how long it takes for a Demogorgon to mature, we can’t risk the town being overrun by them. We almost died with only one, so I know for a fact that all hell will break loose with dozens of Demogorgons being around,” Mike explained resolutely. He sighed, crossing his arms as he stared at the ground pensively.

“Well, let’s see if we can—Oh my god!”

Will dropped the slug in his hand onto the ground as if it had burned him, causing everyone to look at him in alarm. Everyone looked at it to find that it was thrashing around violently, as if having a terrible seizure of some sort. Then, a leg tore out from its side. Then another.

“It’s—It’s growing!” Dustin shrieked. Mike and Will jumped back in horror as Dustin panicked and Lucas fumbled around for his pocket

knife in a frenzy. Eleven was hyperventilating, and she could feel her grip on her powers coming loose. She expected herself to pass out without an outlet to reach, but instead, the room around her became suddenly clear and real as if she were out of the Upside Down, and she felt blood ooze out of her nose. The lights flickered brightly, objects around the room floated around her, Will was looking at her as if he knew she was there, but her focus was on the creature that was struggling to pick itself up off the ground on its newly developed limbs.

The boys were completely silent, only able to watch in pure terror as the miniature version of the Demogorgon raised itself off of the ground. Then, a peculiar event laid out in front of them that none of them would ever forget. The lights flickered rapidly, every object not tied down floated steadily into the air, the room seemed to turn freezing cold, and the young monster opened its mouth and cried a terrible scream.

The strangest occurrence in this event, however, was the split second flash of a presence before them, a familiar girl holding out her hand towards the small creature before disappearing. Then, the baby Demogorgon exploded. Black and yellow sludge was splattered all over the floor around the area the Demogorgon had been, covering Mike and Will in its remains.

“Oh, gross!” Lucas exclaimed, wiping off some slime off of his face as Dustin gagged while pulling some out of his hair.

“Did-Did you guys-?” Will began, before Mike let out a hysterical laugh. Everyone stared at him in concern as he whooped loudly, throwing his slime-covered arms up into the air.

“She’s alive!” He shouted, his demeanor a bit too celebratory as a reaction to what had just occurred. Will couldn’t help but welcome the distraction from the current problem, however.

“She had hair, though,” Will said questioningly. Mike’s eyes lit up, and he grinned.

“Was it short? Because she’s been in the Upside Down a year, so I think her hair must have grown since then, but not too much, since she basically had a buzz cut when we first met her.”

“Yeah, it was short,” Dustin said as he flicked a speck of goo off of his chin. “And yeah, I saw her too, Mike.”

“Eleven’s really alive,” Lucas said, shaking his head in disbelief. “Nothing can kill that girl. She’s like a cockroach.”

“A cute cockroach,” Dustin corrected, before Mike shot him a look and Lucas snorted.

“As cute *as* a cockroach, you mean.”

“Shut up, Lucas!”

“Why are you taking it out on *me*? Dustin’s the one who made a comment about El being pretty!”

“I said cute, not pretty. Mike, Lucas just called El pretty. What are you gonna do about it?”

The boys continued to bicker as they helped Will off of the floor, not forgetting the dire situation their friend was in as they continued to attempt to lighten the mood. Will smiled weakly at the taunts and teases his friends threw at each other, and closed his eyes.

“Just hold on a little bit longer, Eleven. Somehow, me and the guys will get our act together long enough to get you out of the Upside Down,” He thought to himself before joining in the argument between his best friends and allowing himself to relax, the fact that his friends finally knew of his problem and wanted to want to help him enough to calm his ever frazzled nerves, if just for a moment.

Author's Note:

im crying i jstu want hER TO BGE AHPYYPY